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CAMEL BELLS

A BOY OF BAGHDAD

BY

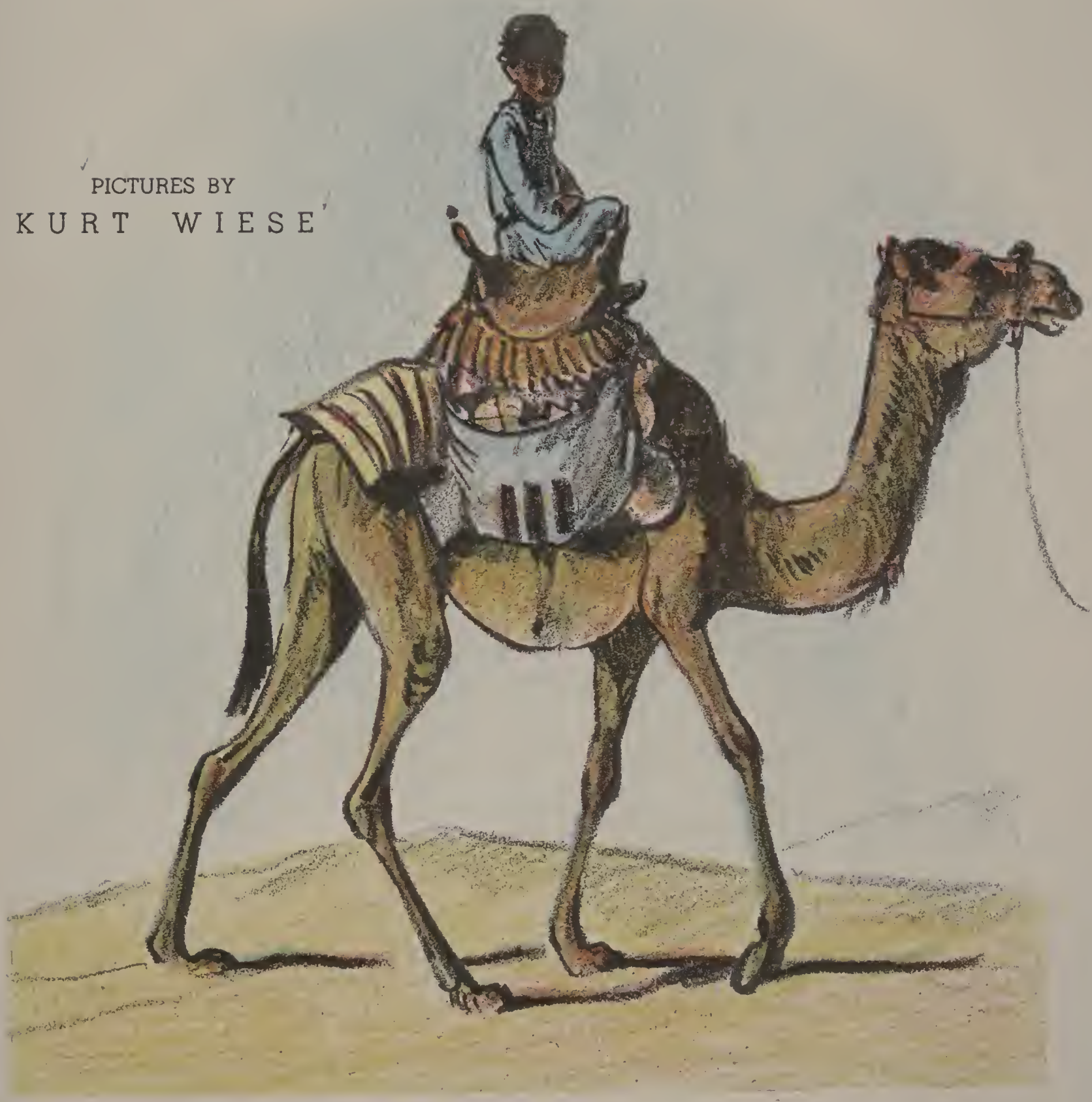
ANNA RATZESBERGER

AUTHOR OF

ALI HASSAN OF HAMADAN

PICTURES BY

KURT WIESE



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THE CALL TO PRAYER

(Arabic script)

اَللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ
اَشْهَدُ اَنْ لَا اِلٰهَ اِلَّا اللّٰه
اَشْهَدُ اَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُوْلُ اللّٰه
اَشْهَدُ اَنَّ عَلِيًّا وَلِيُّ اللّٰهِ
حَيَّ عَلَى الصَّلٰوةِ
حَيَّ عَلَى الْفَلَاحِ
حَيَّ عَلٰى خَيْرِ الْعَمَلِ
اَللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ
لَا اِلٰهَ اِلَّا اللّٰه

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Nazar started away with his father

I

BOAT RIDE ON THE TIGRIS

SUNRISE and a high, clear voice singing the call to prayer from a nearby minaret:

"Allah is great; there is no God but Allah;
Mohammed is His prophet.

Come to prayer; come to prayer.

Prayer is better than sleep.

Allah is great; there is no God but Allah:
Mohammed is His prophet.

Come to prayer; come to prayer."

Nazar (pronounced Nă-zar′) stirred uneasily on his mattress. On the roofs of neighboring houses men were rousing themselves to join in the song of prayer:

La Allah illal-liha Mohammed Rassoulallah

In this district of poor mud houses along the east bank of the river Tigris lived Nazar ibn Nouri (that is, Nazar, the son of Nouri). Seven years before, he had been born amid great rejoicing of the women of the home, for he was the only man-child in a family of eight children. Three sisters had died while they were still babies, but the four other girls had been strong enough to survive the hardships of poverty, disease and filth.

"Nazar! Nazar! Sleepyhead! Wake up and come down to the street. Habib is here to play with you," his sister Fatima called to him from the court.

School bells never rang for Nazar. Indeed, the only bells one ever heard in the streets of Baghdad were those of the camel and donkey. But Nazar was too poor to go to school, even to the crude little religious schools which years later were to be replaced by government schools. So his days were spent in play along the river or in mischief in the street.

The sun shone so hot on the boy's mattress on the roof that he became uncomfortable. Remembering his sister's words, he stood up, stretched himself and nimbly climbed down the steep steps of the outside stone stairway to the ground floor. Night clothes and day clothes were the same to him. He simply tightened the belt of his loose blouse, straightened his little skullcap and was ready for the day.

Habib was waiting at the door.

"*Salaam* (greetings)," he said. "Shall we play by the river? Let's make a boat today."

Nazar gulped his tea rapidly, tore off a strip of thin, coarse bread and finished his breakfast in the street.

"See what I found!" Habib continued. "This old basket, two strips of iron, and some pieces of wood. *Mash-allah* (May God will it)! We can make a fine boat."

It was but a few steps to the water's edge. Nazar and Habib were soon busy bending and twisting the strips of iron. Skillfully they bound the many pieces of wood to the large, round, shallow basket. It was hard work for young fingers, but the boys worked eagerly at their plaything.

Finally the battered old basket became a boat, or rather a crude, round raft. Carefully pushing it into deeper water, the boys saw with pride that it floated calmly on the surface. Then they climbed on very carefully so that they would not upset the awkward little boat. As master of the craft, Habib held the paddle and guided the raft as it floated with the current.

They were floating along very smoothly with a distant herd of water buffaloes as their goal, when a motorboat from the opposite shore began to point its nose directly across their course.

A motorboat began to point its nose directly across their course

"Quick, Habib! Paddle faster!" Nazar screamed. "We must get out of the way of that big boat."

Habib did paddle faster. But his raft had not been made for accurate guiding and he could not turn it quickly enough out of the path of the oncoming motorboat. In a moment it was upon them. It did not actually strike the boys. But the frail little raft was caught in the swell and overturned, boys and all. Nazar and Habib thrashed about in the water, got their bearings, and then began to swim toward the shore.

Like every other boy who spent much time along the Tigris river, these lads were good swimmers. From the time they were scarcely more than babies, they had played on homemade rafts and on the water buffaloes that rolled and basked in the shallower water. So many times had they fallen off into the water that they began to swim without actually seeming to learn.

Tired and breathing hard, the two boys reached shallow water, waded through the thick mud and climbed up the bank. The blazing midday sun soon dried their garments.

"Habib, we forgot the raft. It is still in midstream."

"Can you see it, Nazar? I can't. How can we get it?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid it is lost. Or, maybe another boat has struck it and broken it to pieces."

"Dirt on my head! That is a great misfortune and sorrow. It was hard work to make that raft, and I hunted for a long time to find enough wood for it."

"That doesn't matter, Habib. We can find more wood and make another raft some day."

Nazar, however, never made another raft. That night the family were all seated on the floor eating their supper of barley bread, cheese, olives, and *mast* (thick sour milk) when Nouri, the father, announced his plans for Nazar's future.

"Nazar, how would you like to be a coppersmith when you are big? I am only a *hamal* (a porter). All I can do is to carry heavy burdens on my back. And that is very hard work with little pay. You see how poor our home is, and it can never be any better. Your sisters cannot have much of a wedding dowry and you cannot have an education in the school. But if you learn to be a coppersmith, your life might be easier than mine."

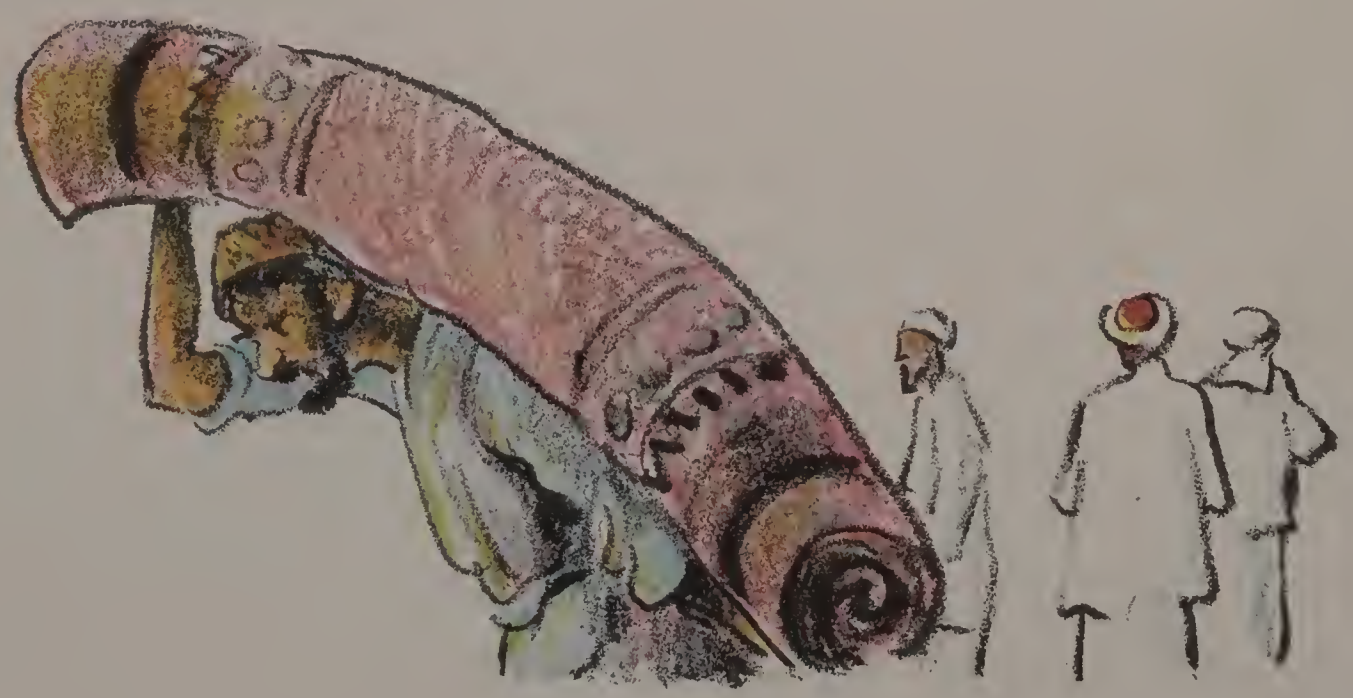
"As you wish," replied Nazar dutifully. He was thinking of the new raft he had meant to make. If he became an apprentice in the copper bazaar, there would be no more playtime for him.

"Nazar, you lucky boy!" one of the girls cried out in delight. "We have to stay in the house all day and see no one. But you can spend the day in the bazaar. You will see hundreds of people and hear all the gossip. I wish I were a boy."

"As you wish," Nazar again murmured. But he had decided that there might be some fun, after all, in the copper bazaar.

In the dusk Nazar and his sisters sat on the floor and listened to their father tell of his day's work—the beautiful table and chairs he had carried on his back to the home of a British army officer, the large Persian rug he had carried from a caravanserai to the rug bazaar, the accident he had seen when two carriages locked wheels and the drivers had a fight. His was a life of color and excitement.

"Nouri," the mother spoke softly, "our little coppersmith has gone to sleep. You must carry him up the stairs to the roof and lay him on his mattress."



II

IN THE COPPER BAZAAR

The call to morning prayer was sounding in his ears when Nazar felt someone shaking him.

"Wake up, Nazar! Wake up, coppersmith!" Nazar blinked hard, looked dully at his sister, and finally remembered that he was to begin work in the copper bazaar that day. Then he became suddenly awake, alive, excited.

"Oh, yes! Today I am going to hammer pots and pans and water jugs. Fatima, I think I shall be able to pound as loudly as the big men," Nazar told his sister. She was already rolling the bedding into a bundle to place with the other mattress rolls in the center of the roof. Nazar smoothed his loose cotton blouse, straightened his skullcap, and climbed downstairs.

"*Salaam,*" he said respectfully to his father and mother and sisters who were already eating. Breakfast was a simple meal of coarse barley bread and strong tea or coffee, and was soon finished. Esmat, the mother, folded some bread and dates in a square of cotton cloth, tied the opposite corners together, and gave the little bundle to Nazar.

"This is your lunch," she said. "Your father can come home for his noon meal, but you must stay at the copper shop all day. Now be careful and don't let anyone steal it."

Nazar hooked his finger under the knotted cloth and started away with his father. Far down the street he saw Habib.

Nazar said to his father, "He is going to play with the water buffaloes, but I am going to be a coppersmith." And over and again he said to himself, "I am going to be a coppersmith."

They entered the covered bazaar. Men were rolling up the iron shutters of their shop fronts and hanging out their wares. Donkey boys were prodding their little gray beasts, urging them to hurry with their loads of fresh merchandise for a busy shopkeeper. Scribes were settling themselves on a convenient rock or hole in the wall and spreading out their writing materials, eager for the first customer.

Nazar quickened his steps as he heard the noisy clanging of the hammers. Nouri led him down the Alley of the Coppersmiths and stopped before a dark little shop where a sharp-eyed, burly fellow stood expectantly waiting.

"Is this the boy, Nouri?" he asked, looking closely at the timid Nazar. "He seems very young."

"Young, perhaps, but strong as a buffalo," replied Nouri proudly. "He will be a good worker." Turning to his son he said kindly, "Work hard, Nazar, and please your master. I will come for you at sunset."

Nazar stood for a moment and watched his father disappear around a bend in the alley. Then he turned to look about him.

One side of the shop was entirely open to the street. The side walls were hung with an array of copperware ready for sale—water jugs, pitchers, basins and bowls gleaming red against the smoke-blackened walls. At the back of the room was a monster furnace and near it the bellows. On the floor lay pieces of copper, unfinished jars and pots, hammers, tongs, and a pile of fuel.

"Nazar, you are to tend the fire and pump the bellows today," Hamad, his master, explained and showed him just how he should handle the great, awkward bellows. Nazar really wanted to hammer neat little dents in a beautiful basin, but he was afraid of this strange man. So he mumbled only a polite "*Na'um, ala rasi* (Yes, on my head)!" and looked at the fire which Hamad was beginning to kindle in the furnace.

"Nazar, you are to tend the fire and pump the bellows today"

"Step lively, boy! Now the bellows!" Hamad was a hard worker and wasted no time. He intended to keep his apprentice busy.

Nazar had been looking for a place to put his lunch. A small hole between the bricks in the wall seemed to be just the spot. He drew the little cloth-covered parcel out of his shirt and poked it into the wall. Then he set to work. All morning he stood by the fire, adding fuel and pumping the heavy hide bellows. Once he stopped to rest and Hamad boxed his ears soundly.

"No idleness here!" he cried, "That is the reason I let the other boy go. If you expect to be a good coppersmith, you must work hard. Only women and old men sit around."

Nazar was never caught idle again, but many times that day he thought of Habib who was playing along the river.

At noon Hamad laid down his hammer and spoke more kindly to the boy.

"Take this coin," he said, "and bring me some coffee and a hot squash sandwich. Then you may eat your lunch and rest for a few minutes."

Nazar darted away and mingled with the crowd in the bazaar street. At the coffee shop he lingered for a moment and listened to some men talking. One of them wore a long, loose brown robe, an *aba*. On his head was a loose cotton scarf with a thick cord coiled around it.

"He is a *sheikh* (an Arab chief) from the desert," thought Nazar. "He has probably brought some sheep to sell. I think I should like to live on the desert and tend sheep. At least, there would be no one around to box my ears."

That reminded him of his errand. He bought the food and carried it back to Hamad, who was standing in another shop talking to a fellow worker. Hamad took the coffee and vegetable sandwich, and Nazar went back for his own lunch. He reached for the cotton bundle. It was not there. On the floor lay the cloth, but the food was gone.

"Who has taken my food?" cried the lad and he ran to Hamad with the empty cloth. "See! It is gone, all gone, and I have nothing to eat. Someone has stolen it."

"Where did you leave it, boy?" inquired Hamad.

"In the little hole in the wall," Nazar answered, beginning to cry.

"Ho! Ho! Anyone could see it there. Don't you know the bazaar is full of thieves? Someone probably took it while I was talking to my friend here. Never mind! I will give you a *pice* (less than half a cent) of your wages now and you can buy some bread at the coffee shop."

The boy thanked him and decided his master was not so bad, after all. When he had finished his lunch, Hamad pointed to an unfinished pitcher that hung on the wall.

"Next time," he said, "put your lunch in this. It will be quite safe. But you must be careful that no one sees you putting it there. The beggars around here would almost steal your shirt. Don't trust any one. Now, build up the fire and let us get to work again."

"Ho! Ho! Anyone could see it there"

And so the day passed for Nazar. The smoke hurt his eyes and throat, the clanging of the hammer hurt his ears, and pumping the heavy bellows made his back ache. At sunset he stopped. Hamad gave him another coin and he ran to meet his father.

Sitting in the dusk after the evening meal, his sisters eagerly questioned him. Did he see many people? What did they say to him? Who was his master? What was he like? When he went to bed that night, he decided that it was better to be a boy and work hard than to be a girl and have no excitement.

As the weeks passed, he became more skillful and the work became easier. Hamad never boxed his ears again; he even gave the boy an extra *pice* now and then. And gradually Nazar learned to know some of the other boys who worked in the bazaar, boys like himself who were apprenticed to the coppersmiths.

One day just before the noon hour Nazar glanced up from the furnace to see some foreigners—two men and an unveiled woman in a white dress—watching him and his master. He stopped and smiled at them. Hamad, however continued pounding a small, graceful bowl that was nearly finished.

"What a beautiful bowl!" said the woman. "I should like to have it for my flowers." One of the men asked the price.

"Four *rupees,*" Hamad answered and held it out to them. (One *rupee* is 36 cents.)

"Four *rupees!* Oh, no! Make it one *rupee,*" the foreigner said.

Nazar smiled. He knew the bowl was worth less than a *rupee,* but that was the way one bargained in Baghdad.

Hamad considered. "Three *rupees,*" he said, "because you will have to wait a few minutes while I finish it."

"No," said the foreigner, shaking his head, "I cannot pay more than two *rupees.* We will look elsewhere."

"Just a minute, *sahib* (master)," cried Hamad eagerly. "You may have the bowl for two *rupees,* but it really is worth much more." Hamad finished pounding the surface and gave the bowl to Nazar, who polished it on his shirt and presented it to the foreign woman with a smile.

"It is yours. May you be blessed in it," he said politely and waited expectantly while the foreigner counted out the pieces of silver. As they turned to go, he spoke up piteously.

"A little present for me, *mem-sahib* (lady). Won't you give me a little present? I work very hard and receive so little. Just a little present, please."

"Yes," put in Hamad, "the boy deserves a present. He helped make the bowl."

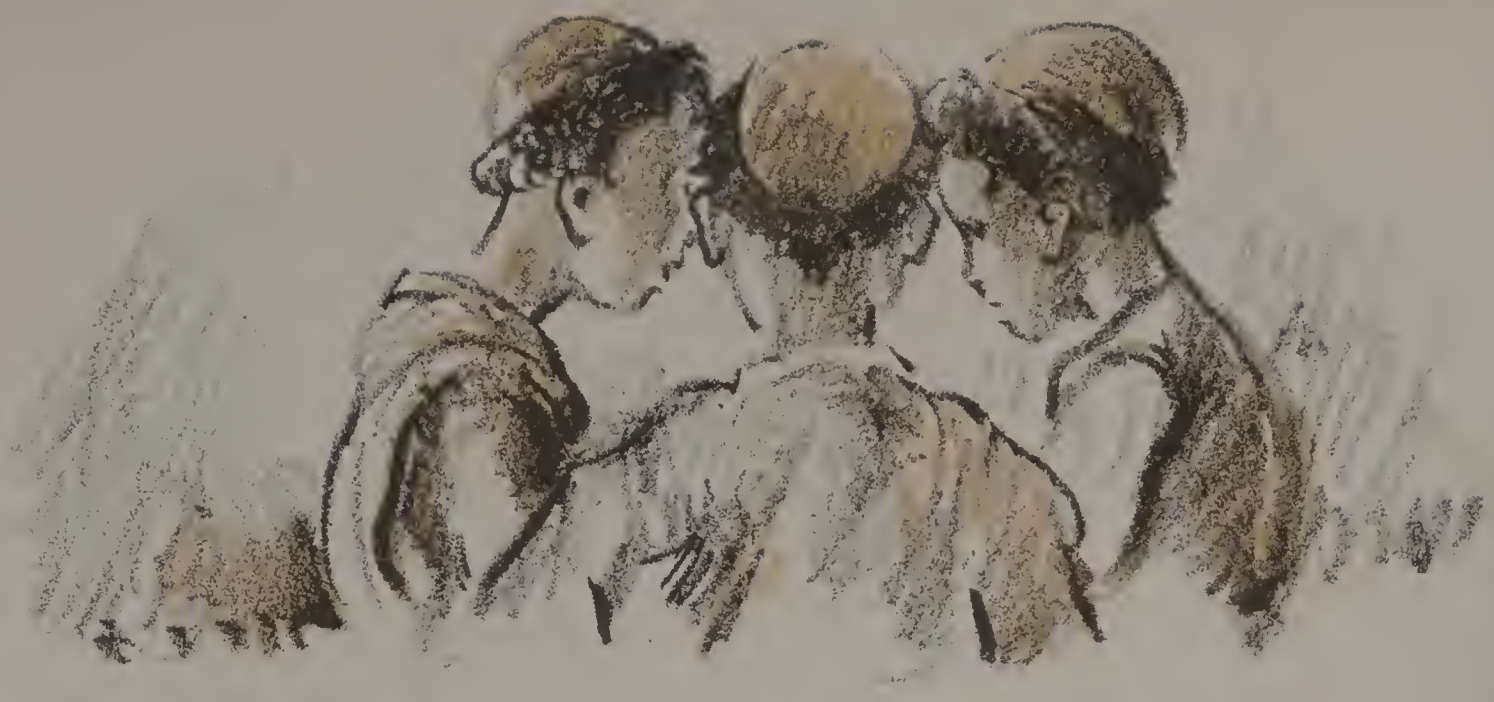
The foreign woman slipped a silver coin into his hand and then hurried away, probably glad to get away from the noise and smoke and copper fumes. Nazar thanked her and continued calling after her until she was out of sight.

"May your hand never pain you! May your shadow never grow less! May Allah be good to you and always protect you."

Then he looked in his hand. An *anna* (two and one-half cents)! A whole silver *anna!* As much as he earned in a day! How rich the foreign woman must be!

It was the noon hour. He hastened to get Hamad's coffee and then hunted up his own friends. Together they ate their bread and olives, while he told them of the visit of the foreigners.

"See! Here it is!" He held out the coin, and each boy touched it and looked at it.



"They must be very rich, those foreigners," murmured one boy.

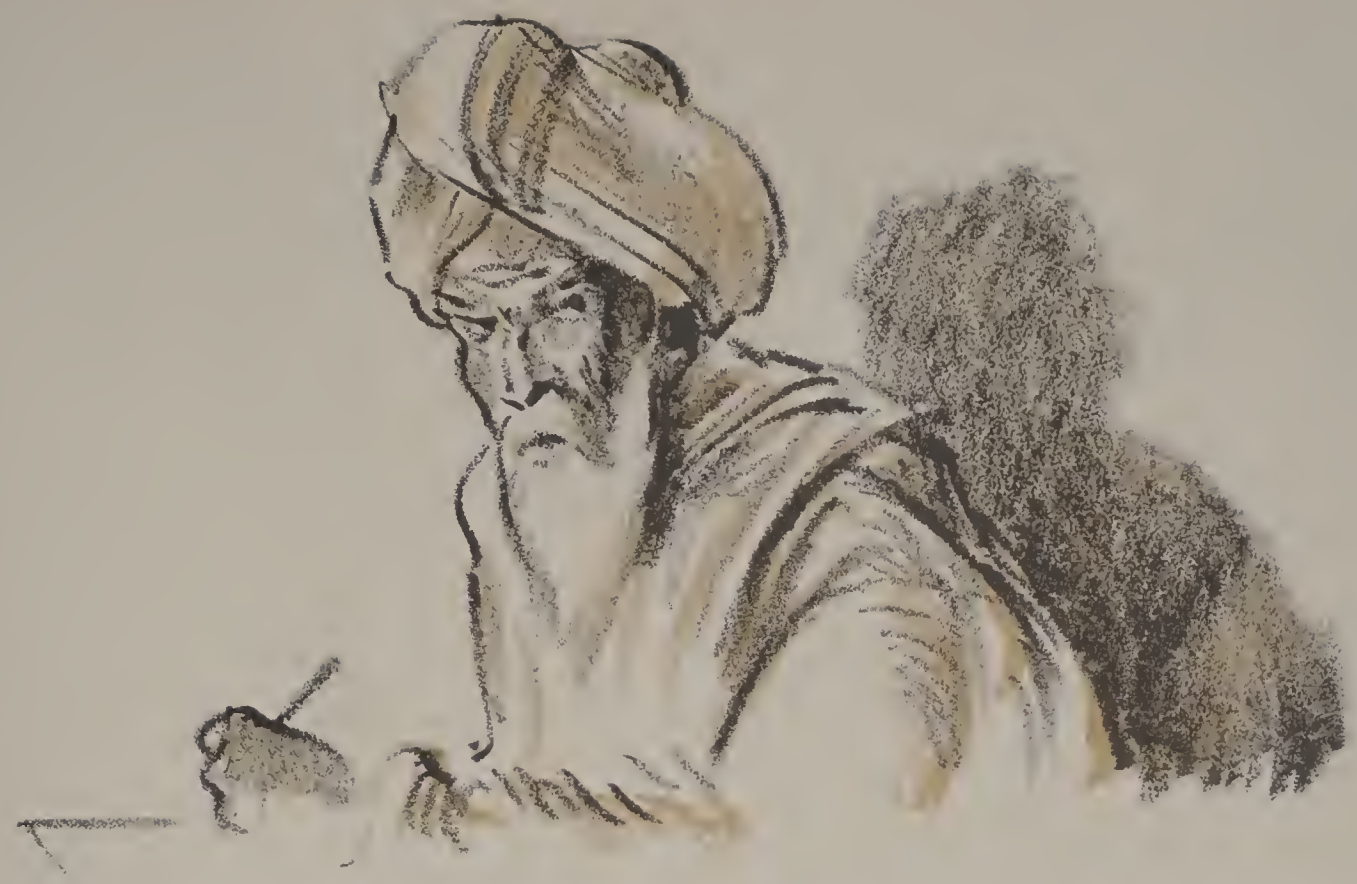
"Yes," answered Nazar, "they were very rich. They paid two *rupees* for that bowl. The men had money and the woman had money. And I think she had another *anna* in her hand."

Nazar could scarcely wait until evening to tell the family of his good fortune. His favorite sister, Fatima, was not at the gate to meet him. The oldest sister met him and told him the news. Fatima and two other sisters were ill. Nazar wanted to rush in and give dear Fatima his coin. It might make her well, he thought.

Nouri, the father, was worried.

"Did you go to the *mullah* (priest)?" he asked the mother.

"Yes, yes!" Esmat replied. "I went to the *mullah* and told him my three girls had a rash on their necks and had fever. He wrote three prayers with purple ink. Then I dipped each prayer in a cup of water and bade the girls drink it. The water was a beautiful purple and the prayer was very holy. It should make them well soon, *insh'allah* (if God wills it)!"



Next morning the girls had more fever and the rash had spread in great ugly spots and covered many of the strange tattooed designs on their bodies. Nazar went to work with a sad heart. At noon he went to the big Friday Mosque and offered the *mullah* his *anna* if he would write a prayer that would make Fatima well again.

The *mullah* wrote a long prayer for this sum and Nazar guarded it closely all afternoon. When he reached home, he hurried to his mother with the prayer. But she too was ill and was in the darkened room with the three girls.

"Sister, what is the matter?" Nazar asked fearfully. "Is everyone going to be ill? Isn't Fatima better? See this prayer. I gave the *mullah* a whole *anna* to write a prayer for Fatima."

His sister shook her head. "Fatima has more fever. I don't think she will get well. The neighbors say it is the plague and they won't come near. They are afraid that they too will get it. You must not stay here tonight. Perhaps you can find a sheltered corner in the street where you can sleep. But it would not be safe for you, if we have the plague."

There he ate his supper

Nazar gathered up a handful of olives, some cheese, and a large piece of bread.

"Don't forget the prayer," he said, and went out the gate. He knew just the place along the river where he could sleep. It was a little protected corner formed by two high garden walls. He and Habib had often played there and sometimes found an old sack or pile of rags that someone had thrown away.

So he went down to the river. There he ate his supper and played a while in the water. But his day's work had been hard and he soon grew tired. Having found the little corner, he huddled down on a sack and went to sleep.

For many days and nights he lived in this way—working in the bazaar, sleeping near the river, and seeing nothing of his family or neighbors. Then, one day—it was Friday and the bazaar was closed—he went home. The elder sister came to the gate.

"Come in," she said. "May God will it, you are still safe. But the others, they are gone. It was the plague. Only Fatima is left. She will get well."

"The prayer!" thought Nazar with a full heart. "Praise be to Allah, the prayer saved her."

"With father and mother both gone," the elder sister continued, "we cannot stay here any longer. As soon as Fatima is well again, we must leave. When it is certain that we are free of the plague, Fatima and I can perhaps enter some large household as servants. But you, my poor little Nazar, what will become of you?"

"Oh, I can take care of myself," Nazar spoke up stoutly. "I can work each day and sleep by the river. And when I am a little bigger, I will take care of you and Fatima."

The girl knew that in a few months she was to marry Hossein, who was trying hard to earn money for the new home. In the meantime, she and Fatima could work as household servants. But what was to become of Nazar? His father and mother were gone, and in a short time even the home would be gone too.

III
THE FORGOTTEN ERRAND

Winter had come to Baghdad, but it never became cold. Instead of being unbearably hot, the days were now pleasantly warm. The nights were cooler and Nazar slept indoors on the hard, bare floor with only a dirty cotton quilt for bed and covering. Fatima was well again and able to play with Nazar when he had a Friday holiday.

"This is our last day together," she reminded him. "We are lucky, sister and I. We are both going to work in the big house of Sheikh Hassan. I am to tend the baby, and sister is to be the sewing woman. And we are to wear sandals. We bought them yesterday. It seems very strange to wear anything on my feet; but this is a fine house and the mistress said we must wear sandals."

Nazar took the sandals and examined them curiously

Nazar took the sandals and examined them curiously —the narrow straps that crossed by the big toe and joined the ankle strap, the fine hand-stitching, the smoothness of the leather.

"Some day, when I am big, I shall wear sandals too," he boasted. "And now I am going to take father's rope and shoulder pad and pretend I am a *hamal* (porter). I'll carry that empty water jug on my back for a while."

Now Nazar had been trained to be a coppersmith and not a *hamal.* He neither fastened the rope securely around the jar, nor set the shoulder pad properly on his back. He had taken scarcely a dozen steps when the jar slipped and crashed on the ground. Frightened by what he had done, he was about to run out the gate when his older sister called to him.

"Nazar! Nazar! Come back! It doesn't matter," she said. "We are leaving tomorrow and we shall not need the water jug. Come closer; I want to tell you something softly. Yes, now listen! When we go to the big house tomorrow, there will no longer be a home for you. But I have thought of a scheme. After nightfall you are to come to the little gate at the far end of the garden. I will let you in and you can sleep in that old, empty room by the street wall. Then I will let you out very early in the morning and no one will ever know you have been there."

"All right," Nazar agreed. "That will be fine. But now I am going in the street to play with some boys. They are waiting for me."

"Come closer; I want to tell you something softly"

The boys, older than Nazar, were *hamals.* Though it was Friday—the day of rest—they had been loitering in the street, hoping that someone would call them to carry a load. But the streets were almost deserted; so they began to play. They set their palm leaf baskets and ropes against the street wall and began to play "knuckle-bones." These bones were the small, irregular, six-sided bones in the sheep's leg, and were tossed and played much like the Western game of matching pennies. The game itself was hundreds of years old.

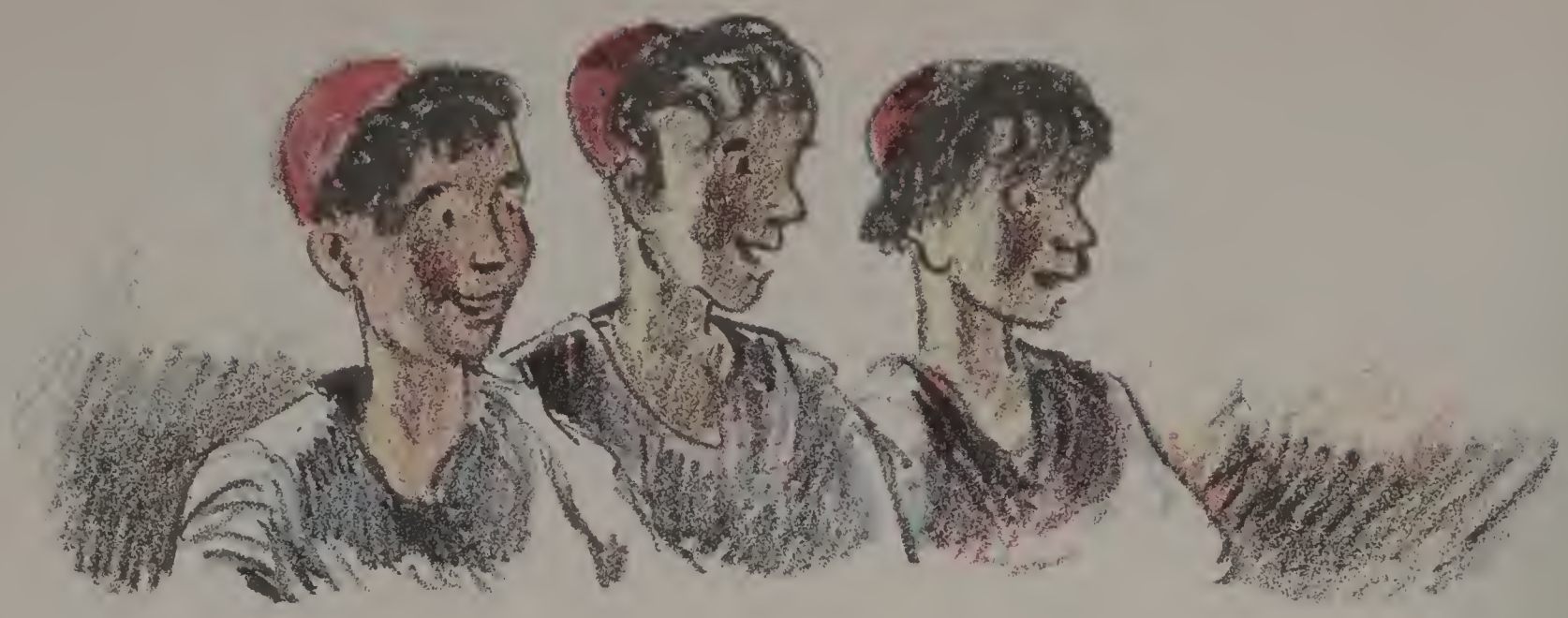
At one city to the south of Baghdad, a foreigner had dug up some of these bones which had been drilled on one side and weighted with metal. Even as long ago as 200 B. C., the boys of that country had been gambling with knuckle-bones.

When they became tired of tossing bones, they had a stone-throwing contest. One boy always threw the stone much farther than the others. He even laughed at Nazar for being so clumsy.

"But, Abdullah, how do you do it?" Nazar asked in some anger. "I may not be as big as you, but I am as strong. I know I am a better swimmer. Then why can't I throw a stone as well?"

"Do you want me to show you?" Abdullah offered. "Just like this! Swing your arm like this. So! Now try again."

Nazar tried again and again. Finally he could throw the stone almost as far as Abdullah.



"*Mobarak* (Luck to you)! God give you strength!" the others shouted excitedly as they watched him. He was such a little fellow that these bigs boys enjoyed showing him their greater skill. Afterwards, whenever these same boys met him in the bazaar or on the streets, they always challenged him to a contest of stone-throwing.

Besides the *hamals,* Nazar had friends among the donkey boys. One day Hamad, his master, sent him on an errand in another part of the city. On the way he passed a garden where part of the street wall had been torn down. Donkeys were carrying loads of brick, mortar and stone into the garden where workmen were building a house.

"What fun!" thought Nazar. "I shall watch them a few minutes."

One, two, three, four, five. Donkey after donkey turned in from the street with its load. Then no more came. Two carriages had been coming rapidly from opposite directions. The last donkey in the street became bewildered and started across the path of the oncoming *arabana* (carriage). Turning his horses suddenly to avoid striking the animal, the driver locked wheels with the other *arabana.*

Donkey after donkey turned in from the street with its load

The frightened donkey began to bray and nearly knocked over a turbaned *mullah* who had been walking in the street. The enraged priest caught the donkey boy and slapped him soundly for his carelessness. When the carriages finally drove away, the boy took a metal goad, which had been hidden in his hand, and prodded the donkey near its tail. He wanted to get into the garden in a hurry after all the trouble he had had.

However, someone had seen the sharp little goad and had watched him hurt the donkey. It was a foreign woman who had been passing. She seized the luckless boy by the ear, demanded the goad, and jabbed him several times before he in his surprise could get away. Then she went on. The boy came out of his hiding place, picked up a sharp stick and beat the donkey to ease his own feelings.

"Those foreigners!" he muttered. "What business is it of theirs? I was in a hurry, and that was the only way to make an animal move faster. What does it matter, anyway? A donkey hasn't any feelings."

Nazar had seen the whole incident. Pressed close against the street wall, he had seen the look in the donkey's eyes when the boy had jabbed it.

"If the goad hurt the boy," he was thinking, "why wouldn't it hurt the donkey, too?" He had never thought of that before. Then he remembered something.

"Wasn't that the *mem-sahib* who gave me the *anna* last summer? I'll just follow a little way and see where she goes."

He had completely forgotten his errand. He was thinking only of the kind woman who had given him some money—the very money with which he had bought Fatima's prayer. Perhaps she would speak to him and he could thank her again for the money, for saving dear Fatima's life.

Through street after street he followed, dodging donkeys, *arabanas,* camels and motor cars, but always keeping the foreign woman in sight. Then she turned into the avenue Sinak, and without having even noticed Nazar, passed through a beautiful gate and was gone.

Hamad was in an ugly temper when Nazar returned

IV

NAZAR'S NEW MASTER

Hamad was in an ugly temper when Nazar returned.

"Two hours you have been gone," he bellowed, and struck Nazar on the head. "Two hours! and it should have been only a few minutes. When you finish your work tonight, you are done. Do you understand? Done! Done! I want you no more!"

Nazar was frightened. He knew that he had wasted the master's time. But he was only a little boy and he still liked to play. It had been exciting to watch the donkeys, and he had wanted so much to see the kind, foreign woman again. This was the first time he had ever played during work hours, and he was being punished for it by losing his job.

When the elder sister opened the little gate that night, she saw that something troubled him.

"Nazar, what is it? What is the trouble?" she asked.

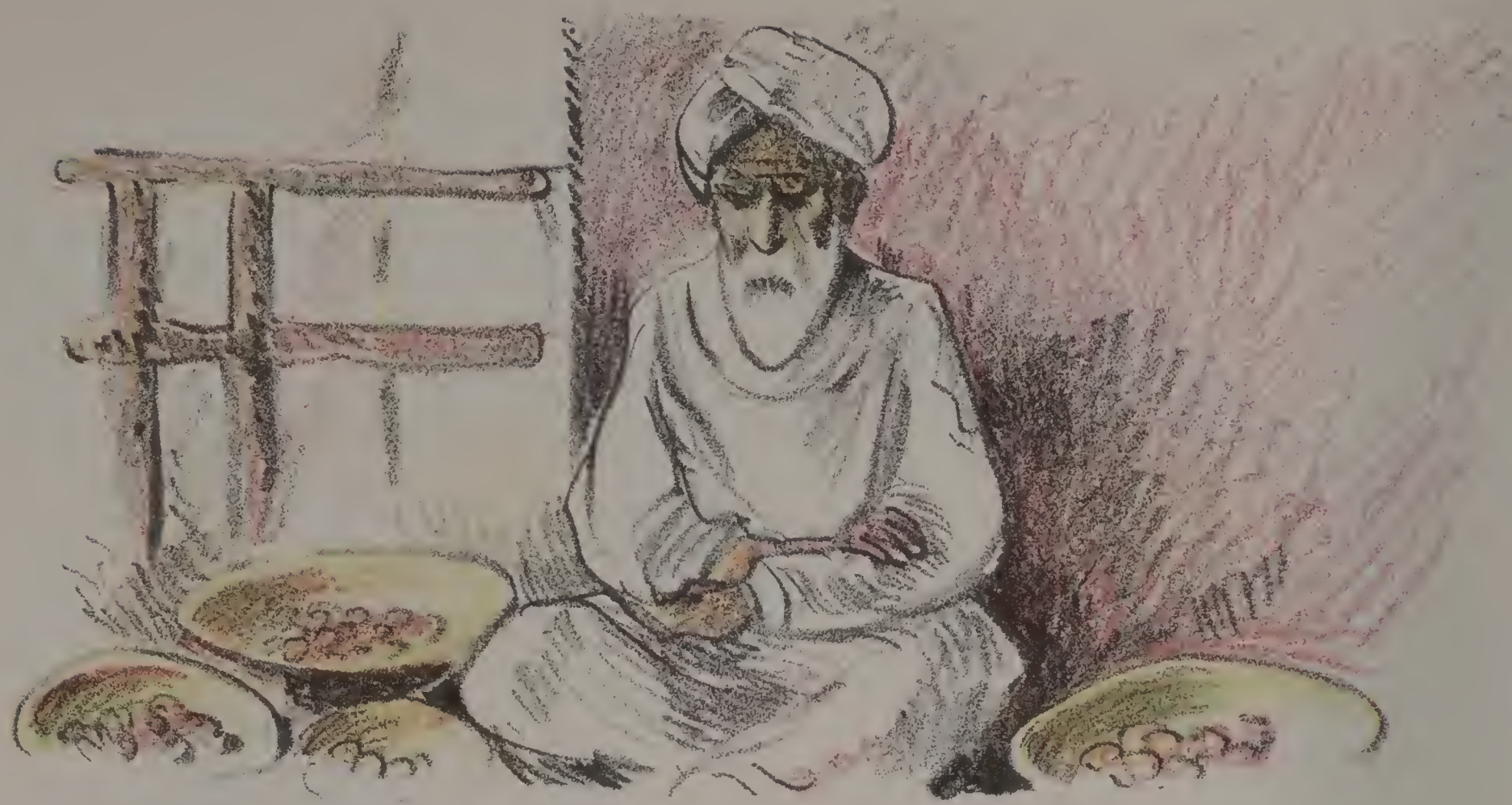
Then he told her how he had spent the afternoon following the foreign lady to thank her again and how angry Hamad had been when he returned to the shop.

Nazar did not worry long, however, over the loss of his job. Next morning he took his father's palm leaf basket and determined to work as a *hamal* for a few days.

Like the other boys, he followed first one shopper and then another, hoping to be allowed to carry the purchases. Sometimes a dozen boys followed the same person and displayed their brightest smiles as they begged for work. Once Nazar carried a basketful of food for a hotel cook. The man lived a long distance from the chief bazaar, but he gave the boy only a *pice* for his work. When Nazar complained of the small pay, the man gave him a kick.

"If the *pice* was not enough, I'll give you a kick. How is that for a fine bargain?" he said, and laughed at his own joke. Nazar picked himself up, shook the dust from his clothes, and went away without answering.

Returning to the bazaar, the lad had to pass the great Friday Mosque. He always felt a thrill of pleasure when he looked up at the beautiful dome with the delicate crescent above it. Near the entrance was the old man who always squatted beside his tray of sweets and nuts.



Nazar looked over the array of dainties—dates, figs, raisins, nuts, squash seeds, even some brittle molasses candy. He bought a handful of dates and talked to the old man as he ate them. While he was standing there, a man came out of the mosque and stopped to buy some figs. He was a *sheikh* of the desert and wore the loose, brown robe and headdress like the man Nazar had seen in the coffee shop.

"Master, have you some work that I may do?" Nazar asked eagerly. "I am strong; I can run errands quickly." Then he remembered the errand on which he had loitered, and flushed with shame.

The *sheikh,* who was known as Khalif ibn Kathim, saw the flush and thought the boy was embarrassed—new at the work perhaps, and a little shy. Soon he was asking Nazar about himself, and the lad told him how both his father and mother had died of the plague, how he was now homeless and had no work. Khalif ibn Kathim listened and then spoke kindly.

He was a sheikh of the desert

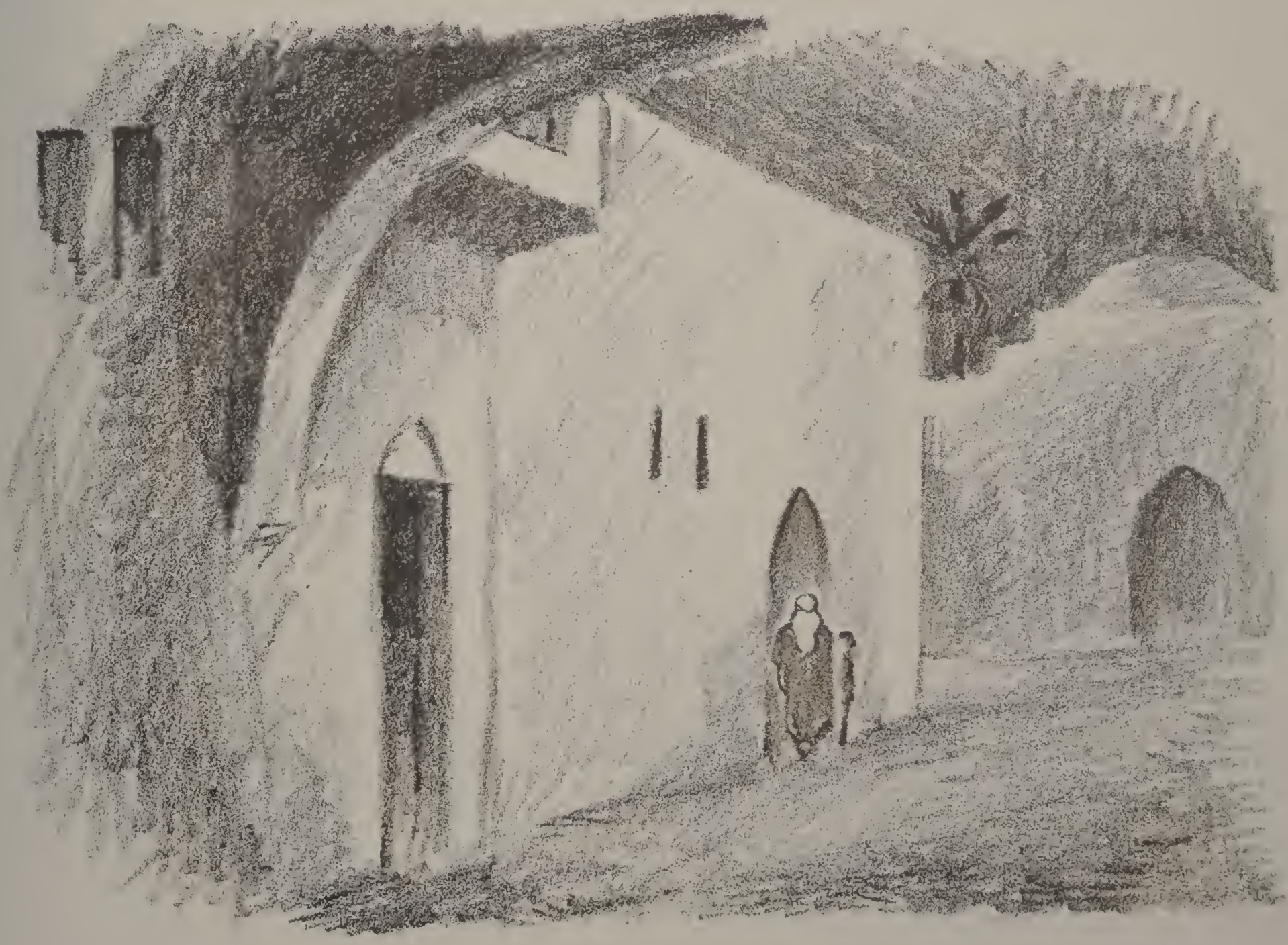
"I can use another shepherd boy," he said. "Will you come with me and make your home in my tents on the desert?"

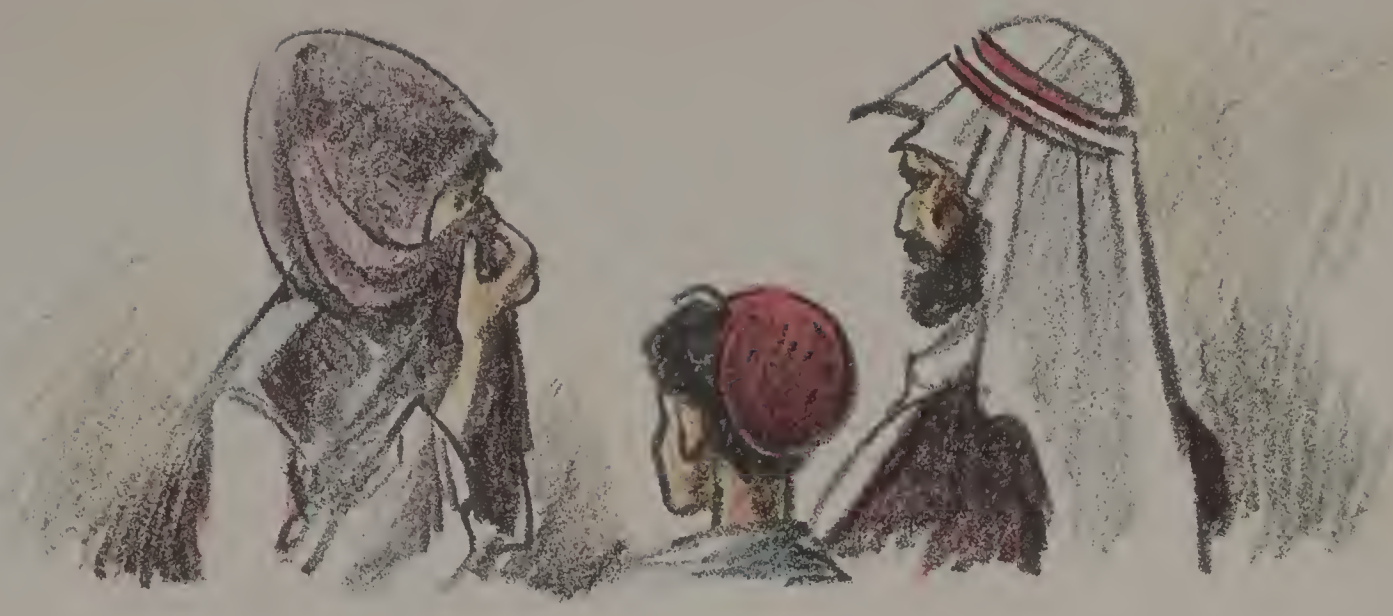
"*Na'am, ya sahib* (Yes, on my head)! Yes, I should like to!" Nazar replied. "But I must get the permission of my elder sister."

It is an unwritten law of the desert that an orphan may be taken in to the nearest big tent and set to work tending sheep. Khalif had had several orphan boys working for him. For their labor, he gave them their food, shelter, very scanty clothing, and a few sheep each year. When these boys reached manhood, they were put on the land. They exchanged some of their own sheep for cows and donkeys, saved enough to buy a wife and tent, and became part of the great family of the big tenter.

Nazar was in luck to come under the protection of the *sheikh*. When it was quite dark that night, he led Khalif to the little gate where his sister waited. Opening the gate, she saw a strange man and quickly pulled the veil across her face.

"Peace be to you!" Khalif spoke in low tones, for Nazar had warned him that the owner did not know of his using the little gate. "I am Khalif ibn Kathim. My tents and my flocks are on the Green Spot which is three days' journey northwest of the city. Tomorrow at sunset I shall return to them. The boy Nazar has told me how he is without home or parents and I have offered to take him into my tent as a shepherd. Are you willing that he should go with me?"





The girl stood silent. She was so surprised she did not know what to say. Nazar could have a home now. But would the man be kind to him? And would they ever see him again if he went to live on the desert?

"Do you want to go, Nazar?" she asked gently.

"Yes," he replied.

"I am willing," she said to Khalif. "There is no home for him here, and he is too young to be left alone. Yes, it is better that he should go with you." Khalif then spoke to Nazar.

"Do you know the caravanserai of Mahmud? Yes, it is the big one near the river. Be there tomorrow at sunset." Then he departed and Nazar and his sister waited in the darkness until Fatima's work was finished and she joined them for their nightly family gathering. The girls were saddened by the thought of the separation.

"Three whole days' journey!" they said. "We may never see you again." They had never been outside Baghdad and thought a three days' journey would take one almost to the end of the world. A two days' ride by motor car would indeed take one across the desert to the very edge of the Mediterranean Sea, but the *sheikh* traveled by camel and his tents were less than sixty miles from the city.

"Be there tomorrow at sunset," said the sheikh as he departed

Nazar's last day in Baghdad passed rapidly. First he went down to the river to hunt for Habib and bid him good-bye. Then he went to the bazaar to buy farewell gifts for his sisters. With his few remaining coins, he bought a flimsy, pink celluloid bracelet for the elder sister. Fatima already had a pretty nose-ring set with a bright blue Persian turquoise. So for her he found a beautiful, heavy anklet.

"Now she will be as beautiful as other girls," he thought proudly. "She need not be ashamed of her bare ankles, for this anklet is as large and shiny as she could wish."

A priest singing the call to prayer from the minaret of the Friday Mosque recalled to him the fact that it was noon and time to eat. What should he do? Fatima's anklet had taken his last coin. He went to the old man from whom he had bought dates the day before.

"*Baba* (old man)," he said piteously, "will you give me a few dates?" But the old man replied gruffly that he did not feed beggars. Nazar wandered on and asked another seller of sweets, but again he was refused.

Then he saw his chance. A string of donkeys, laden with goat skins full of dates, had been weaving their way through the traffic. One donkey had been crowded against a carriage and knocked down. The goat skin bag slipped from its fastenings, rolled onto the street and burst open. In a flash half a dozen boys were after the spilled dates, Nazar among them. Luckily, he got hold of a handful. Someone had ground a dusty heel into the mass, but that made no difference. It was fruit, rich and sweet in spite of the filth and Nazar ate it with relish. Then he went to the garden where his sisters worked, gave them the presents and bade them good-bye.

"*Fee iman Allah* (In the faith of God I leave you)," they told each other and parted. Nazar decided to find the caravanserai of Mahmud and wait there for Khalif. In one quiet little nook where a house wall jutted into the street, he was surprised to see his friend, Abdullah, the boy who threw the stone so skillfully. Abdullah was squatting on the ground playing with a sparrow.

"What are you doing?" Nazar asked.

"Playing with this sparrow. Just watch! I tied a string to its leg. Now I let it fly away and then jerk it back. It is great sport."

"Why don't you clip its wings? Then it couldn't fly. I have seen many boys clip pigeons' wings."

"What are you doing?" Nazar asked

"But this is more fun. The bird thinks he is going to get away, until I jerk the string. Then it falls down and flutters about a while. It is great sport to tease him. Why don't you catch a sparrow and —"

A hand fell heavily on Abdullah's shoulder. A passing foreigner had been watching this bit of cruelty. He seized the boy to scold him and reached over to rescue the poor bird. Abdullah screamed lustily and began to kick the well-dressed stranger. A crowd soon gathered and a policeman asked the cause of the trouble.

"He was beating me! He was kicking me! He had me by the throat! He tried to steal my sparrow!" Abdullah lied to the officer. The policeman turned to the foreigner, who explained truthfully.

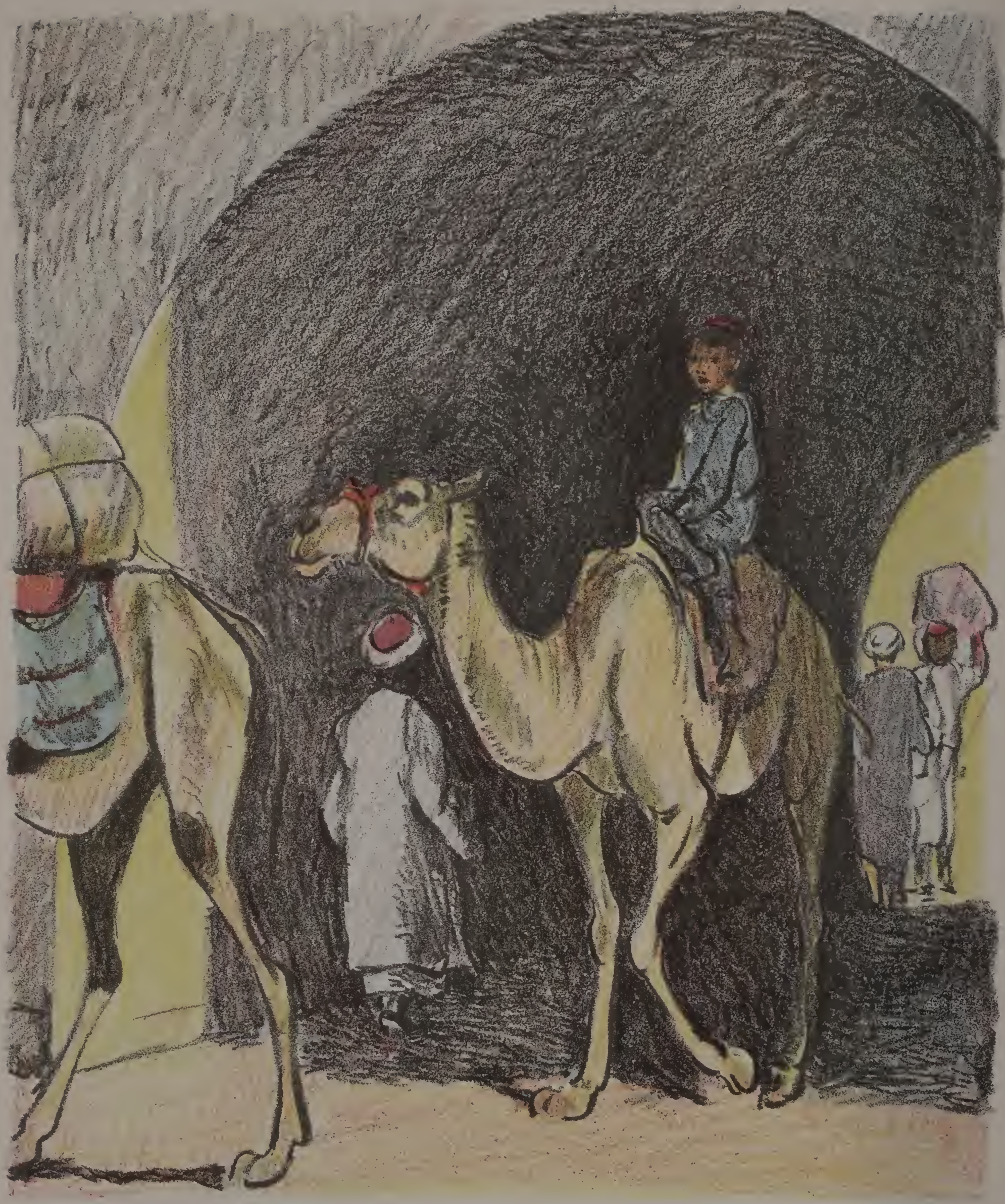
"I saw this boy torturing the poor little bird and wanted only to make him stop his cruelty." The crowd burst into laughter.

"Cruelty! It is not cruelty. A sparrow is so small it cannot feel. Everyone does it. Why, our grandfathers used to do it! Surely there is no harm in having a little fun with the bird."

The foreigner could not convince them that they were wrong. Even the policeman was against him. It was different in Iraq, he said. Then he told the foreigner to give the boy enough money to buy two more birds and warned him not to molest children in the street again. As the crowd broke up, Nazar slipped away. He decided he did not like Abdullah quite so well, after all.

The gate of the big caravanserai was open and Nazar went in. In the center of the great hollow square were camels lying down, waiting to be loaded. Everywhere were men busily tying bales of freight onto the sleepy camels. In the desert country it is better to travel by night and rest by day. Hence the bustle and confusion each day at sunset.

Around the edges of the square were single-room compartments which traders and travelers rented for sleeping quarters and storing motor cars. Merchants from the bazaar stored their wholesale purchases here until they could be transferred to the shops.



Nazar rode out the gate with the chief

Nazar watched the activity with great interest. He found Khalif and busied himself running errands for his new friend. At last all the camels were loaded, roused to standing position, and each one fastened to the next by a chain. On the first and last camels the driver hung a set of bells, four graduated bells, set inside each other.

Nazar climbed onto his camel, hung on dizzily while the animal got to its feet, and rode out the gate with the chief. Khalif rode in a box-like seat protected by a canvas canopy. Nazar was shown how to sit on the burlap saddle and hold on with his knees. His perch was not uncomfortable and he enjoyed riding through the crowded streets of the city. Now it was the donkeys and *hamals* that had to get out of his way!

They had left the flashing river and turned their faces westward. Now they were passing a mosque and a priest stood in the minaret calling the Faithful to their prayers. His clear, strong voice rose above the noises of the street. The tinkling and booming of the camel bells were but an accompaniment to his song:

La Allah illal-lihah Mohammed Rassoulallah

V

THE GREEN SPOT

Three long nights of travel with only the stars and a few faint tracks to guide them brought the caravan at last to the Green Spot, where the black tents of Khalif ibn Kathim could be seen in the faint light of early dawn. The spongy feet of the camel had broken the jolts of the ride; so Nazar had not been tired by the journey. Indeed, he could scarcely wait for his camel to crouch down on the ground so that he could climb off and become acquainted with his new home.

Everyone had come out and gathered in front of the largest tent. Family and servants eagerly welcomed the master's return.

"Light to our eyes! May your arrival be good!" they said, crossing their arms on their breasts and bowing respectfully.

Khalif returned their greetings. Then he saw that they had noticed Nazar and were looking at him with suspicion.

"Nazar, come here," he beckoned to the newcomer. "This boy I have brought from Baghdad. He is an orphan and I am taking him as one of my family. Ali and Jasim, you came to my tents as orphans six years ago. I shall place Nazar in your care. Teach him the ways of the desert. He is from the Great City on the Tigris and knows only the ways of the city. Teach him to care for the sheep, that he may earn his keep and be of value to me. And you, Jasim, teach him to ride. You can cling to a camel like a flea. But I noticed that Nazar had some trouble with his camel. Was it not so, Nazar?" Khalif laughed heartily and went inside his tent.

Nazar looked about him. The Green Spot was a low place between several low, rolling hills. The ground was only faintly green where the grass had been nibbled close by the flocks. A small clump of palm trees marked the location of a well.

The people of the desert, the Bedouins, lived a wandering life and depended on these widely scattered wells and the five inches of rainfall each year for the water for themselves and their flocks. Perhaps the lack of water was one reason for their washing so seldom.

Huddled close to the precious water were a half-dozen black tents, so crude and flimsy that they could easily be moved from place to place as the supply of grass wore out. One tent was the master's; two were his sons'; one was the women's tent; one, the men's; and one, the newest of all, was Ali's. He had recently bought a wife and tent and now had his own home. Nazar looked at the people. They seemed about like all the Baghdadis he knew, except perhaps for a little less clothing and a little more sunburn.

Some of the boys bore ugly scars that had been caused by playing with fire. Instead of skullcaps such as Nazar wore, most of these boys of the desert wore turbans or scarfs thrown loosely over their heads.

The men began to unload the camels, while the women and children watched curiously to see what had been brought from the Great City. It did not take long. The chief had taken to the city a big load of raw wool, spun yarn, and handwoven woolen cloth. He had brought back a small load—bags of coffee, cones of sugar, salt blocks, and a bolt of cotton cloth. People lived simply on the desert and their needs were few.

The men began to unload the camels

"Come with me, Nazar," said Ali, the orphan who had lived with Khalif for six years. "It is already late and I must take the sheep out to pasture."

Ali gathered his flock together and started toward the hills. As the two boys walked along, Nazar asked many questions and Ali told him about the life of a shepherd.

"You have to take the sheep out at dawn and lead them to pasture. Since you are new, the master will probably give you only fifty to tend. I have been with him six years and I can now tend a flock of five hundred. All day you have to watch so that none of them wanders or is stolen. At sundown you will lead them to water and then bring them home. It is the same every day."

"And do you receive no wages?"

"Oh, yes! The master pays well. Every six months he will give you seven lambs per hundred, and your food and clothing, too."

Looking at Ali's scant and tattered garments, Nazar wondered how many years it had been since the shepherd had received any new clothes. Ali continued to speak of the flock.

Ali told him about the life of a shepherd

"Of this large flock, many are mine. In the last lambing season the master gave me thirty. My own little flocks had lambs, too, for I breed them carefully. And it is the custom for the master to feed the sheep and cattle of his servants' flocks. I should have had a larger flock of my own, but I exchanged some of the sheep and goats for a cow and donkey. Some of them I sold to buy a wife and tent. Last summer the master put me on three acres of land. So I shall not work as his shepherd after you are trained. I shall be busy with my own flock and land."

"And where did you get your tent, Ali? I see no shops here." Nazar was puzzled.

Ali laughed. "The women wove it of goat's hair. When you look through it toward the sky, you think it is flimsy and that the little holes will let the rain come through. But it is not so; the goat's hair cloth sheds water. And then, it seldom rains, anyway. The worst thing is the sandstorms. Sometimes the winter winds are very cold. Then it is that we wear our warm brown *abas,* which the women weave from camel's hair. Yes, you have much to learn."

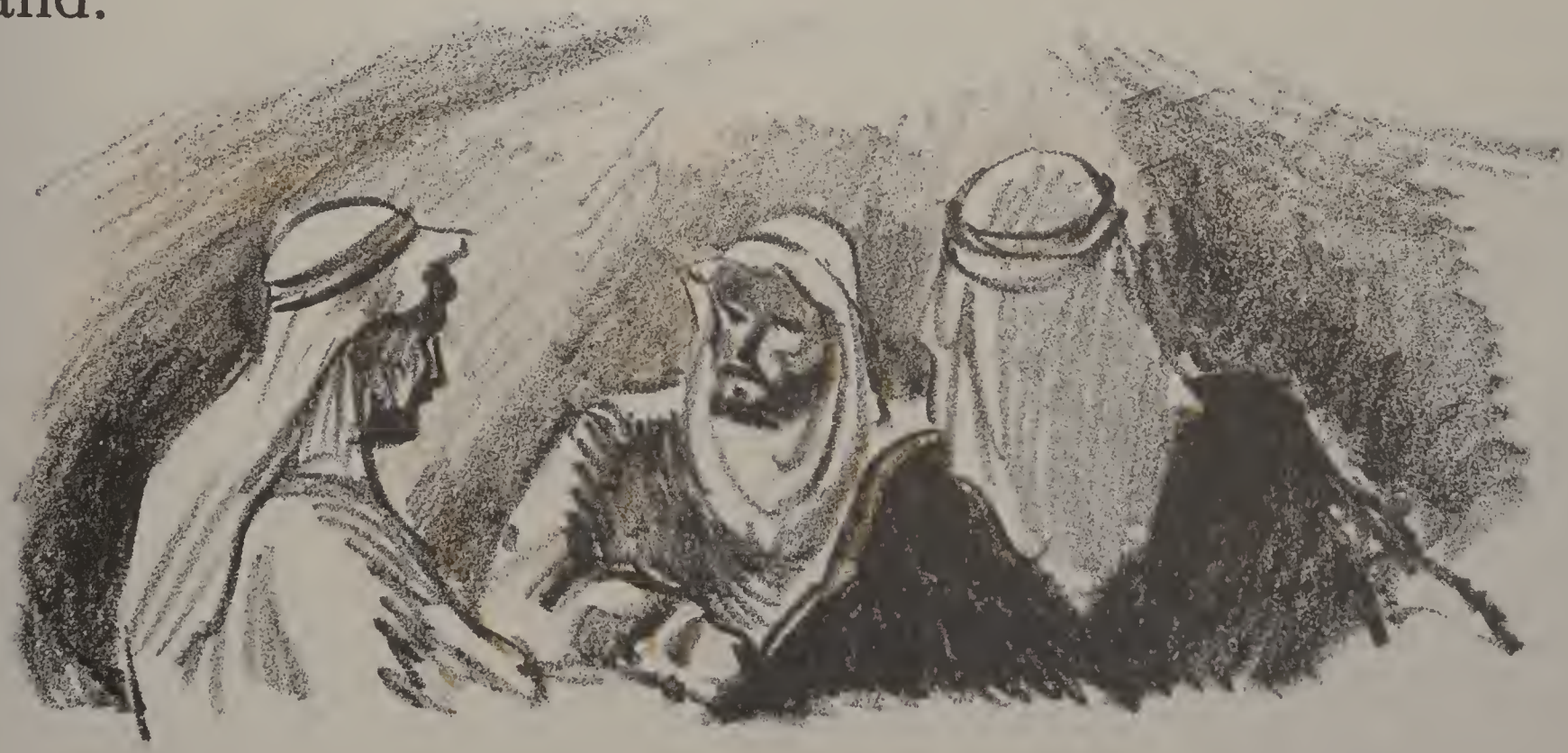
Nazar learned one very strange thing that day. At noon the boys sat down on a large rock to eat their lunch of coarse barley bread and dates. Then Ali stood up, went over to a little white goat, and led it back toward the rock.

"Now, Nazar," he said, "I will show you how to finish your lunch." Ali lay down underneath the goat, sucked at its teat, and had a refreshing drink of warm milk. Then Nazar lay down, but try as hard as he might, he could not get a drop.

"It is a good trick, anyway," said he, "and no one would be very likely to steal your lunch." Then he told Ali how he had had his own lunch stolen the first day he worked in the bazaar.

Ali was interested in Nazar's tale and was amazed at the things he told. He had never seen a shop, had never seen a city, a river, a motor car nor a train. He was very curious to know about them. He had, however, seen the airplane that crossed the desert twice a week.

That night in the men's tent Nazar again told his desert friends about life in the city. They listened eagerly as he described the great river Tigris and could not understand why such a great amount of water did not wash away the land.



"We have heard of another river west of us, the Euphrates it is called, but we have never seen it. A traveler told us of it once," an old man spoke up. Then Nazar listened to their tales of desert life and at last fell asleep where he sat. When he tumbled over in a heap on the ground, someone threw a camel's hair robe over him and he lay there until morning.

Day after day Nazar went with Ali as he led the sheep out at dawn and brought them back at nightfall. Finally the day arrived when Nazar was allowed to take the flock out alone. Jasim had been given part of the flock to tend and Ali had taken out his own sheep and goats. There remained about fifty sheep which Nazar led to the hills at sunrise.

VI

NAZAR THE SHEPHERD

Nazar sat on a rock in the late afternoon sunshine counting his sheep. He always counted the sheep to be sure they were all there before he started homeward.

"Forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine," again and again he counted. One sheep was missing. Which one was it? He looked over the flock anxiously. Since he had been alone, he had named every sheep and knew each one from all the others.

"It is old Waggle-tail," he discovered. "Where can she be?" Then he began to hunt along the hillside, behind the rocks, in the caves. Down the steep, rocky slope of the other side of the hill he finally found her with a tiny black lamb.

"*Mashallah!* This is a fine place to have your baby!" he said to the old mother sheep. "I can carry your lamb in my cloak, but I don't know how I can ever drag you over the steep rocks."

With much pushing and pulling he got the fat old sheep to the top of the hill. In the few months he had lived on the desert, his feet had become hard as iron from walking on the hot sand. But these rocks were sharp and jagged and he hurt one foot badly. Tearing a piece off his turban, he bound his foot and went back for the little black lamb. It was soft and warm and he held it carefully in his robe as he climbed up the hill.

"Now, old Waggle-tail! You can start for home," Nazar said and called the rest of the sheep. Among the flock were several new little lambs and they ran along playfully beside the older sheep. Nazar led them all to water and brought them to the tents just as the last bit of the big red sun disappeared behind the purple hills.

Nazar limped to the men's tent.

"*Baba!*" he said to a very old man, "I have cut my foot. What can you do for it?" Nazar sat down and unfastened the rag.

"Bah! bah!" the old man said. "That must be burned with a hot iron." He hunted an old saddlebag and brought out a piece of iron. This he heated in the embers of a dung fire and then applied it to the cut. Nazar screamed with pain. The old man smiled.

"*Insh'allah,* it will get better," he said. "A good burning will cure anything from a cut or sprain to a pain in your side."

Nazar wanted to tell him that he thought drinking the ink-water from a prayer was a better remedy, but he was just a little afraid of the old man. So he said nothing.

His foot was still sore next morning; so another small boy, Ibrahim, went with him to help watch the sheep. Ibrahim was full of mischief and promised Nazar that they should have fun that day. At dawn the boys led the flock to a new slope where there was plenty of grass. Then they sat down to play.

Ibrahim had a set of small reed pipes. He showed Nazar how to make a set and showed him how to play on the pipes. The music was very strange. Many times later when Nazar was alone all day, he played on his pipes. Sometimes he tried to play the same tunes he had heard other boys play. Sometimes he tried to make new tunes.

The sheep wandered over the hillside, but the boys paid no attention. They were throwing stones and had forgotten about their work. Nazar showed Ibrahim the trick Abdullah had taught him in Baghdad. They had great fun that afternoon. At sunset Nazar counted his sheep.

Sometimes he tried to play the same tunes he had heard other boys play

Once more a sheep was missing. The boys looked everywhere, but the sheep could not be found. They became frightened, for they knew they had not been watching the flock. When the sheep were led back to the tents, Khalif knew that one was gone.

"Nazar," he said sharply, "what has happened? One sheep is gone."

"Yes, master," replied Nazar, "It is lost. I hunted a long time, but I couldn't find any trace of it."

"Were you alone today?"

"No, Ibrahim was with me."

"That is always the way! When two boys are together, they play and forget the flock. Then the sheep can't find enough grass and go hungry or else some of them wander and become lost. Hereafter, you are to go out alone. Never take a companion with you. And now, do you know the rule? Whenever you lose one of my sheep, you must pay with two of yours. Since you have been with me, you have earned three lambs. When I take out two, that will leave you just one for your six months' work. You will not get rich very fast at that rate."

"Please, master," Nazar spoke timidly, "may I have the new little lamb that I brought home last night?"

"What! A black sheep?" Khalif asked in surprise. "A white sheep is more valuable for its wool than a black one. Did you not know that?"

"Yes, master, but I should like to have old Waggle-tail's baby," Nazar said. He would not tell the man that he wanted the little black lamb because it snuggled its nose down into the curve of his arm as he carried it home. Khalif might have laughed at him.

He was indeed happy that his master let him have the lamb and he branded it with his own mark. The little black lamb was the beginning of Nazar's flock. In the years to come, he would add many more lambs until his flock would number nearly a hundred. And he was always very careful not to let the sheep wander and become lost.

One day he sat on a rock playing a tune on his pipes. The sheep were quietly grazing nearby. Suddenly they seemed to become frightened. Scampering away from the rocks, they gathered around Nazar for protection. The boy watched closely. He saw a movement behind the rock and then a strange face. The stranger looked at the young boy for a moment and then swiftly fled.

Nazar fingered the dagger in his girdle. It was his only weapon. He hoped the man would not come back. The rest of the day he kept the sheep near him and would not let them go near the rocks. When he led them home at sunset, he was relieved to find that none had been stolen.

As Nazar sat on the floor of the tent eating his supper of coarse barley bread, camel's flesh, dates, and sour goat's milk, he told the men about the stranger.

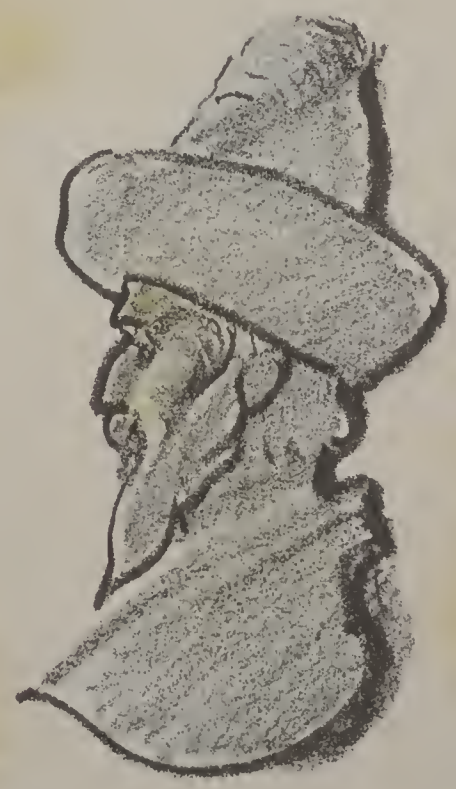
"I think he would have stolen some of the sheep, but he saw my sharp dagger and fled. I frightened him away," Nazar finished proudly.

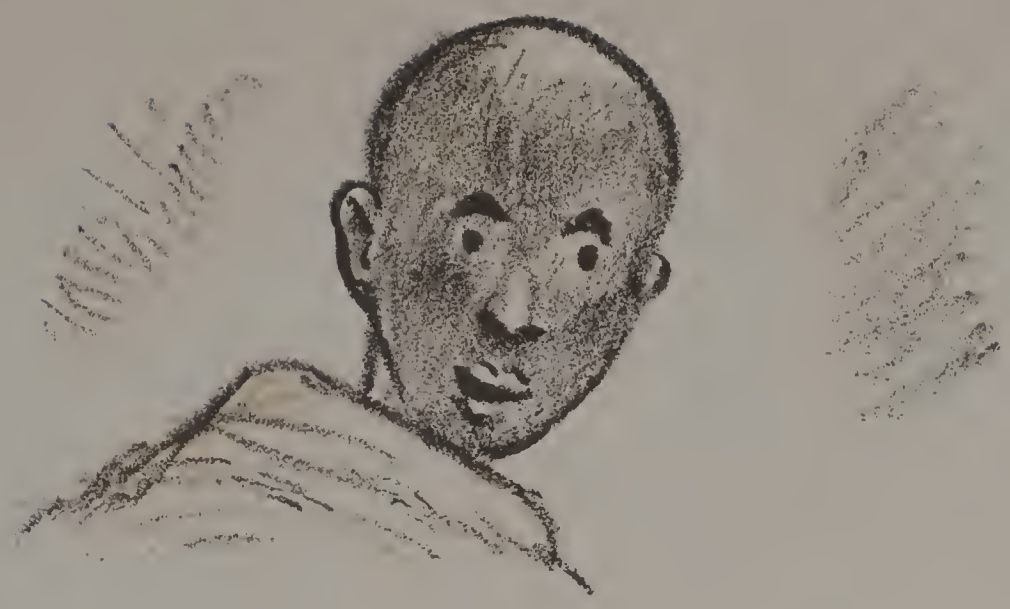
"You frightened him! *Mashallah,* what a big man you are!" they laughed at him. "Don't you know there is honor among thieves? They never steal sheep from a little boy. Now if it had been Jasim here, they might have carried off the whole flock and given him an ugly fight besides. Your dagger is only to kill a sheep that is unwell, so we can have a feast of mutton. You are not apt to need it to protect yourself."

In spite of what the older men had said, Nazar was uneasy and often feared that the thief might come back. But he was never bothered again and gradually gave up his close watch.

During the long, lonely days he learned to make string and waistbands from the raw sheep's wool. He even made other curious things from the bits of wool that he pulled off the cactus plants and camel-thorn. Many times he thought of his sisters and friends in Baghdad and wished that he might see dear Fatima again.

Once he was poking the ground at his feet and dug up a silver coin, thin and uneven and very dark. On it was stamped a face with a heavy beard and a strange, tall headdress.





"I have never seen a turban like that," thought Nazar. "This coin doesn't look like the silver *anna* the foreign lady gave me. I wonder what it is." He showed it to Jasim that night. Jasim was cutting his hair (or rather, shaving his whole head in the strict Moslem style), and had been asking him about his flock. He took the coin and looked at it carefully.

"I saw some money one time, but I don't remember whether it looked like this," he said finally. "Khalif knows about money. Show it to him."

Nazar then told him of the silver *anna* and how the prayer had cured Fatima. Jasim became interested.

"How old is your sister? Is she pretty? Does she have a sharp temper? Is she strong?" Jasim wanted to know a great deal about Fatima. Then he explained to Nazar.

"Next year I shall be ready to marry," he said. "I have been with Khalif nearly seven years. I am a man now—see my fine black moustache—and I want to have my own tent like Ali. The *sheikh* has promised to put me on the land next spring. I have a little flock of my own and can afford to buy a wife and tent. What do you say, Nazar? Do you think I am fine enough to have a city wife?"

Nazar was excited at the thought of having his sister near him. That night Jasim had a long talk with the *sheikh,* which he repeated later to his little friend. Khalif would take a caravan load of camel's hair and wool to Baghdad in a few months. Nazar should go with him and go to his sisters. If both the elder sister and Fatima were willing, Khalif would bring Fatima back as a bride for Jasim.

Now indeed was Nazar happy. He would have a visit to the city. But he would return with the *sheikh,* for he had learned to love the desert life. Fatima would return with him and he could always be near this favorite sister. Only one thought came to trouble him.

"But what will become of baby Waggle-tail while I am gone? Khalif will not let me take him with me to Baghdad, and I am afraid someone might steal him if careless Ibrahim tends my flock. Maybe Jasim will tend him while I am bringing back Fatima."

With that thought he was happy and began to plan what places he should visit when he returned to Baghdad —the broad river, and perhaps see Habib playing with boats; the noisy copper bazaar; the sociable coffee shops; the beautiful Friday Mosque, and the old man who sold sweets by the door; and the avenue Sinak, where he might catch one last glimpse of the foreign woman who had been kind to him in the days of his life in Baghdad.

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